

Walk & Talk Self-Guided Tours

# Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden

Difficulty: Easy to moderate, mostly natural surface trails, with some steps and unpaved slopes

The Garden is open annually April-October; check the Garden's page at [MinneapolisParks.org](https://www.minneapolis-parks.org) for hours and programming.

Founded in 1907 by its namesake and other local schoolteachers, the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and Bird Sanctuary is one of Minneapolis's botanical treasures. Follow curator Susan Wilkins's self-guide through the 15-acre Garden's collection of over 600 native plant species, displayed in a variety of habitats which support a wide variety of birds, insects, and other wildlife.



Photo by Susan Wilkins

**About Your Guide:**  
Susan Wilkins has served as the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden's curator for 21 years.

★ **Start: Welcome to the Wildflower Garden.** The welcome sign at the top of the staircase near the parking lot to greet visitors; the entrance to the Garden is at the bottom of the stairs.

**A. "Let nature be your teacher."** As you pass through the entrance gate, see if you feel anything change — many visitors notice how the city fades away and their senses start to open.

**B. Woodland wonderland.** Starting your walk through the Garden, take a left down the switchback trail. As you walk under a canopy of mature oak trees, listen for bird song, notice the dappled light, and look for the fuzzy fruits of woodland poppy and the tiny, bright red fruits of red elderberry. Can you smell the fragrant, mossy scent of a mid-summer forest?

**C. Turning the corner.** At the bottom of the switchback trail, take another left as you pass by the Martha Crone Visitor Shelter (currently closed). As you near the bottom of the hill look to your left. From all accounts this hillside of interrupted ferns has looked like this since the Garden opened 117 years ago. Rarely are invasive plants, like buckthorn and garlic mustard, found growing amongst these ferns — any guesses as to why?

**D. A forest stroll.** The Garden is known for its extensive collection of spring-flowering woodland wildflowers. In summer, the fruits of spring's blossoms are tucked away along the trails and treetops. See if you can find three different types of fruit along Geranium Path on your way to the wetland garden.

**E. An elevated view.** Entering onto boardwalk, notice how the view changes as you climb above the layers of wetland plants. This beautifully designed boardwalk is decked with thermally modified ash, some of which was harvested and milled from parkland as part of emerald ash borer management.

**F. The heart of the Garden.** Eloise Butler selected this location for the "Wild Botanic Garden" because of this tamarack bog. Insectivorous plants, native orchids, and mossy hummocks were once common in the bog, and native showy lady slippers still thrive here as do tamaracks, which are planted regularly.



**G. Up, up and away.** Leaving the boardwalk, step down and veer left and left again. After walking along Violet Way trail, go right. Before you ascend Hemlock Hill, notice the majestic trees planted by Eloise Butler a century ago. On a hot day, a pause under this grove refreshes. Take a minute to breathe in the spicy scent of the evergreens.

**H. Into the upland garden.** This curated oak savannah-like landscape changes dramatically throughout the season. In the summer, look for a progression of sunflowers, asters and goldenrods. By August, it's a riot of color.

**I. Back to the bustle.** As you leave the quiet fullness of the Wildflower Garden, see if you can remember two or three moments that captured your attention on your walk today. Let these good memories come to life in your imagination; stay with them for 30 seconds or longer to let them sink in. Let these memories nourish you as needed and come back to the Wildflower Garden another day soon, too!



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